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I. INTENSIVENESS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE MONGUORS AND THE POSITION OF ITS FORMS

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC RELIGIOUS LIFE

The religious life of the Monguors is very intensive, and not a superficial veneer that scales off easily. Indeed, it has not only a private and a family characteristic, but a social and compulsory aspect, as well.

A missionary, accustomed to living with Chinese, is quite surprised when he comes among the Monguors, by their almost continuous recitation of *Om Mani Padme H'um*.[1] It is repeated by old and young, both men and women, hundreds of times a day, under all circumstances. The mind of the Monguor appears to be fixed on religion in a most unusual way. Mothers, kissing and cuddling their babies, like to say happily, over and over, "Om Mani," "Om Mani," as if thanking Buddha (*Avalokita*) for the baby. The sick, suffering on the *k'ang*,[2] find relief in sighing Om Mani the whole day, hoping to be cured. When hailstorms threaten crops, Om Mani will be said hundreds of times by every terrified farm family, in the hope that Buddha will make the wind change the course of the clouds. When someone in the village dies, all the villagers gather at night in the courtyard of the deceased, where they sit for many hours saying the Om Mani for the deceased.

[1] The formula *Om Mani Padme H'um* has always been and still is an enigma. All attempts to explain it remain unsatisfactory. Each lama of a sect, each student of things Tibetan has proposed his own explanation. It appears to be of Hindu origin and not Tibetan. Some trace its appearance in Tibet back to the eighteenth, fourteenth, and thirteenth centuries; and even to the seventh century. See P. Pelliot, *T'oung Pao* 24: 395, 1924. The explanation of the formula seems to vindicate *mani padme* as a vocative of *Manipadma*, the proper name of a female deity.

[2] A small platform, two or three feet high, built with bricks, upon which the whole family sleeps, sits, talks, sews, etc. In the front of the platform there is a small oven, the smoke from which passes through brick channels under the platform before reaching the chimney so that the platform is always warm.

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Sodalities, most of them for women, are organized in every village. The members convene to recite the Om Mani as they circle the Bumkhang[2] of the village all day. Whenever a Monguor is in serious trouble, he prays Om Mani, and when a happy event occurs, he gives thanks by Om Mani. Supposedly, all kinds of evil are dispelled and all blessings obtainable by Om Mani.

Monguor families place in the center of their courtyards a high pole with a small flag flying from atop it. Om Mani and other prayers are printed on the flag as an offering, day and night, by the family to Buddha. Prayer wheels, containing hundreds of repetitions of Om Mani printed on paper, are moved by water power, so that Om Mani will be offered continually, as the wheels revolve.

The Monguors have used their Om Mani to such an extent that its true meaning no longer exists. A farmer becoming angry at the lazy oxen, while plowing his fields, will beat them and swear furiously with a well-articulated Om Mani; gamblers, on losing the game, their patience wearing thin, will say Om Mani in a blasphemous tone. While weeding fields, if a lascivious song is enjoyed, farmers say Om Mani, meaning the song is well sung. When a smutty joke is told, listeners will say Om Mani, laughing, to indicate it is a good joke. It is said that thieves and robbers say Om Mani as an aid to their practice of larceny. Foreign travelers jest that, if robbers kill their victim, he will have the consolation, when dying, of hearing the killer saying Om Mani. Om Mani can be and is offered under all circumstances: riding horseback, working in the fields or at home, while laughing, gambling, singing, conducting business, and even sleeping.

The Monguor's fondness for and promiscuous use of Om Mani has reduced it to a mockery of its original intent. Nevertheless, it is in fact most often used as a real prayer.

The Monguors are not ashamed to pray in public, to

[2] A structure at the entrance to the village to prevent the entrance of evil influences.

twist their rosaries on their wrists, even in the city, or to turn a small prayer wheel all day. While no one understands the meaning of the prayer formula, the Monguor saying his Om Mani intends it as adoration to Buddha.

Religion is a family as well as an individual matter. The chief of the family is its religious head and its representative. He worships "Heaven and all the spirits" on the roof of the home or in its courtyard. It is his duty to honor the protector-deity of the family. Each family honors the image of its family protector-deity. At the time of the division of a family inheritance, it is the privilege and duty of the eldest son to continue worshipping the old family deity honored by his ancestors. The chief of the family is its representative at the performance of public rites. Attended by his family, he performs the rite of opening the fields in the spring to start farming; he gives orders for the worship of the various kind of spirits honored by the family—"the spirit of the hearth," "the spirit of the stables," etc.—and sets the example by praying the Om Mani and fingering his prayer beads.

The compulsory social aspect of the religious life of the Monguors is evidenced by the fact that the chief of the village and its elders administer both the official and religious life of the people in it. Even as they apportion land taxes among the villagers, according to wealth and productivity, so do they assess families a fixed sum for religious services. They impose corvées on the villagers for municipal functions as well as for such religious functions as protection against hailstorms or the sacred animal of the village. In the same manner, heads of families are summoned to participate in rites at the temple or on the top of the sacred mountain. The time of religious rites is fixed by the village chief. He performs the community thanksgiving rite just as the family chief does in his own circle.

The village chief is not the only organizer of religious life in the village. The chief of the clan is its promoter. It is he who offers sacrifice at the clan's ancestor rite. On his triennial visit, the clan chief brings the image of the protector-deity of the clan, so that each village may fulfill its duty of honoring it. He makes inquiry about public worship in the village and the morality of his subjects.

Religious activities are part of the family and social life of the Monguor society. Their social organization is woven into a religious environment. The chiefs of families, villages, and clans are its promoters. All clansmen are obliged to participate in the public rites.

The intensiveness of the religious life of the Monguors is further demonstrated by the fact that they are not only known as practicing Lamaists, but also as fervent adherents of shamanism, and practicers of many rites which do not seem to belong to either Lamaism or shamanism, being performed by neither lamas nor

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Tibetan tribes, remnants of important ones which had fled to Kukunor or Tibet. Mongol troops, divided into small units, were settled with their families under the leadership of clan chiefs at strategic points, in order to prevent possible inroads of hostile neighboring tribes. A group of Shat'o living in the country since 936 joined the conquerors and was enlisted among the frontier defenders. The descendants of these groups constitute the Monguors to whom this study is devoted. Later there came also groups of Salars, Turks of Samarkand, to whom territories were assigned. More Moslems also settled in the country.[26]

GODAN

The Yüan dynasty is well known for its devotion to Lamaism. In Tibetan and Mongol literature, Godan, the brother of Güyük (the Emperor T'ing tsung, 1246–1251) is celebrated as the first ardent Buddhist Mongol prince who invited to his residence in Hsi-Liang the Sa-Skya Pandita, Chief Abbot of the Sa-Skya sect.

The holy man accepted the invitation and started his "apostolic" journey. He remained seven years in Hsi-Liang successfully diffusing the religion over the entire country.[27]

According to history, the troops of Godan had defeated the Tibetans northwest of Lhasa in 1239 and destroyed a monastery. The Tibetans asked for negotiations in order to end the war. Godan urged a Tibetan delegate to come to his residence, and Sa-Skya Pandita, to whom this task had been assigned, started his "apostolic" journey on "command" from Godan, in order to avoid the worst. He delivered Tibet into the hands of the Mongol Prince, received a "gold patent," became an official under Godan, and Vice-regent of Tibet. His successors inherited this office.[28] Discontent among the Tibetans over the surrender of Tibet caused a new Mongol expedition to be sent in 1251. More rivalries and discontent had to be crushed again by the Mongol troops in 1267, 1277, 1281, and 1290.[29]

The Mongol emperors, hoping to keep the Tibetans and Mongols in submission by manifesting reverence for the lamas and promoting their religion, lavishly showered favors and privileges on the lamas and became Lamaists themselves. Emperors and empresses received Lamaist initiation, and the Sa-Skya lama Phagspa, chaplain at court, was allowed to sit next to the emperor.[30] The court of the Mongols was sincerely

[26] Louis M. J. Schram, C.I.C.M., The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan frontier, Part I, *Trans. Amer. Philos. Soc.* 44 (1) : 23–57, 1954.

[27] Huth, *Geschichte der Buddhismus in der Mongolei*, 130, 1896.

[28] Tucci, *Tibetan painted scrolls* 1 : 8, *et seq.* It is the merit of Professor Tucci to have shed true light on this old myth about the ardent Buddhist Godan, his invitation to the Sa-Skya Pandita, and the political status of Tibet during the Yüan dynasty. See also Roerich, *op. cit.*, 216, 217–91, 578.

[29] Tucci, *op. cit.* 1 : 18. See also Roerich, *op. cit.*, 216, 217.

[30] Franke, *op. cit.* 4 : 510–517–522.

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cared that their power was too weak and unavailing, that more shamans would have to be invited, and that a big hog would have to be prepared. A few days later more shamans succeeded in the same way as in Hsin-yüan p'u.

This shamanist rite of the first day tallies wonderfully with that of the Wu among the Chinese and the Hsiung-nu in 91 B.C. At the time of the state sacrifices, the Wu were ordered to call down the gods and human ancestors and to lead them to their "thrones," beating drums and dancing while a band of Chinese musicians played appropriate music. They pierced the future, knew the wishes of the gods and the ancestors, knew the desired sacrifices, and were proficient in predictions.[4]

Taoist priests in the country never perform such rites, which are peculiar to the Monguor shamans, who after so many centuries have preserved them faithfully. They give an insight into what, centuries ago, was the religious practice of the Chinese and the surrounding barbarians, and what it is at present among the Monguors. The fantastic invitation and calling down of the spirits, their coming one after another along the rope, which the shaman pretends to see moving with his own eyes, with whom he talks, as if to persons in front of him, whom he greets cordially, is straight in the hallucinatory line specific to shamans. The best among the shamans go so far as to communicate their feelings by means of words and gestures to the well-disposed audience already believing in the reality of the rite and in the capacity of the shaman to see and communicate with gods and souls. They go so far as to make the people feel happy to approach, face to face, the spirits and souls; to sit in their presence; to honor them, and trust entirely in them. To be sure, a religious feeling is awakened by the shamans at the meeting. All my Monguor informants asserted they were happy at that time and enjoyed the rite.

This is the only time during a whole year, when the community of a village prays and honors its gods and ancestors in a group. It was said that nobody would miss attending this rite. No wonder that the Monguors esteem and love their shamans, especially since the lamas never practice such a rite for a whole community.

RITES OF THE SECOND DAY

The second day is a busy one, since four rites are performed: (1) possession by the White Tiger spirit, (2) the greeting of the Goddess of Joy, (3) leave-taking of the spirits, and (4) the nurturing of the spirits of the temple.

POSSESSION BY THE WHITE TIGER

Very early in the morning, after breakfast, the shamans, beating drums and cymbals, sit around the pole

[4] De Groot, *op. cit.*, 1188–1190; 1201–1208, 1247.

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